(b) Chairman of the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff General Richard B. Myers visited New Delhi on 28-29 July 2003 in the context of regular senior level defence engagement between India and the United States to strengthen mutually beneficial bilateral defence relations.

(c) No, Sir.

(d) does not arise.

Surrender of telephones

*412. DR. PRABHA THAKUR:
PROF. ALKA BALRAM KSHATRIYA:

Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether a large number of customers have surrendered their telephone connections under Khar Telephone Exchange of MTNL in Mumbai;

(b) if so, how many telephone connections have been surrendered during the last six months;

(c) whether MTNL continues to send monthly rental bills even after surrender of telephone connections and have not returned their security deposits; and

(d) if so, the reasons therefor and by when MTNL would refund the security deposits for the surrendered telephones?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI ARUN SHOURIE): (a) and (b) Sir, 825 telephones were surrendered from Khar exchange during the last six months *i.e.* 1.1.2003 to 30.6.2003.

(c) A customers needs to be billed for the services rendered till the date of surrender of phone and this is done in the subsequent billing cycle. Therefore, the customers will receive one bill after the termination of the connection covering calls that may have been made before the date of surrender.

(d) Normally, security deposit is refunded within 4—6 weeks. A few cases get delayed on account of non-completion of formalities by the

subscriber *i.e.* payment of final telephone bill, submission of original registration receipt/affidavit in regard to amount of security deposit made by the customer.

Bridge between India and Sri Lanka

*413. SHRI NANA DESHMUKH: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government of Sri Lanka has proposed for a bridge across the Palk Straits and also for starting a ferry service between Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka;

(b) whether the State Government of Tamil Nadu has apprised the Centre about its views;

(c) if so, the details thereof; and

(d) what is the final decision of the Central Government thereon?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) Yes, Sir.

(c) A letter has been written by Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu expressing reservations in this regard.

(d) The comments of the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu will be kept under consideration while examining the proposal.

Amount of food subsidy for PDS

*414. SHRI JANARDHANA POOJARY: Will the Minister of CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

(a) what is the amount spent annually on food subsidy for public distribution;

(b) whether it is also a fact that items like foodgrains, kerosene and sugar meant for public distribution are diverted to the open market in a large scale; and

(c) if so, the action taken by Government to check such diversion and ensure that the genuine beneficiaries get public distribution items?

THE MINISTER OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (SHRI SHARAD YADAV): (a) to (c) The amount spent as food subsidy for distribution of foodgrains under the Targeted Public Distribution System during 2002-2003 was about Rs. 9901.06 crores. No